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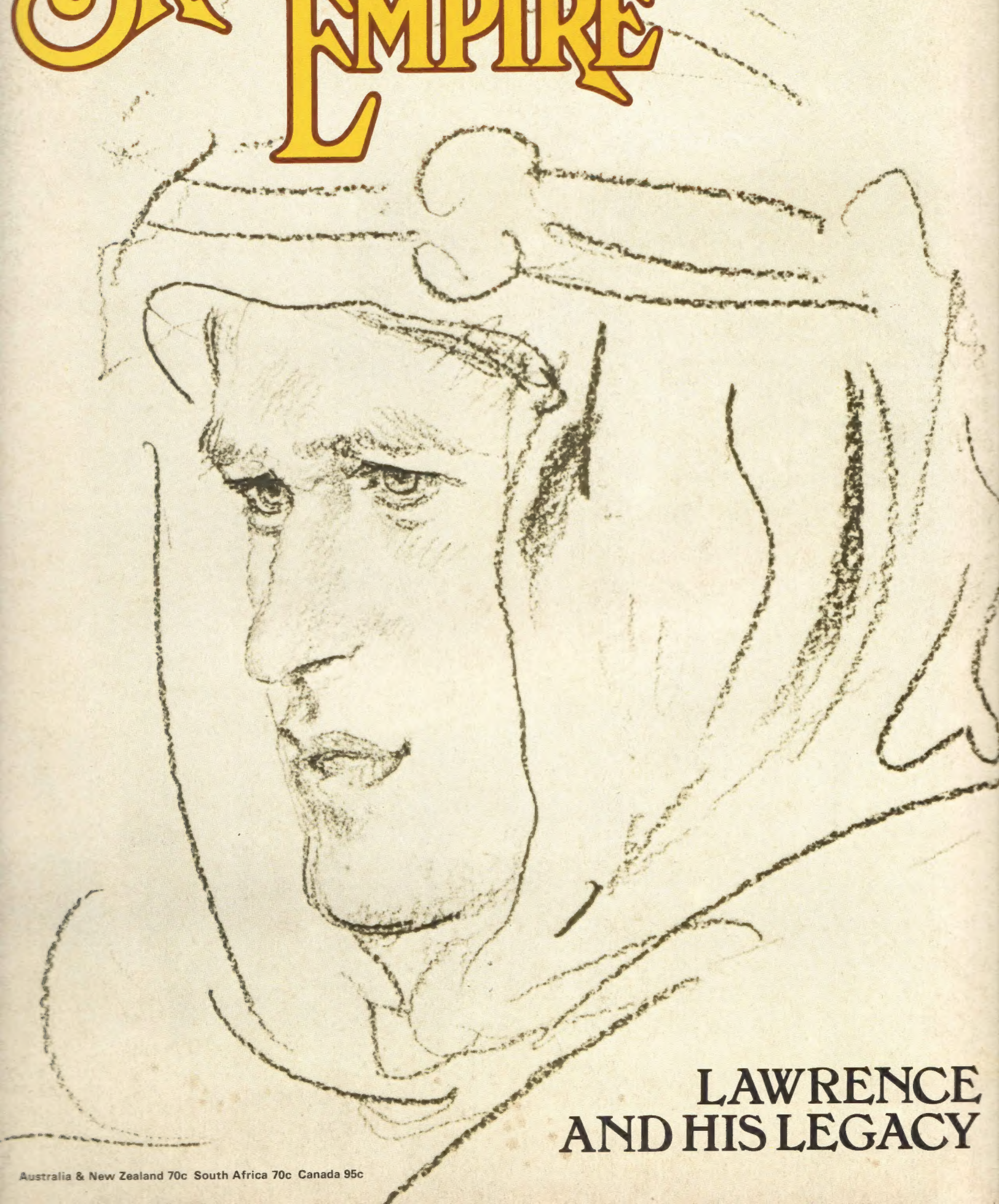

LAWRENCE AND HIS LEGACY

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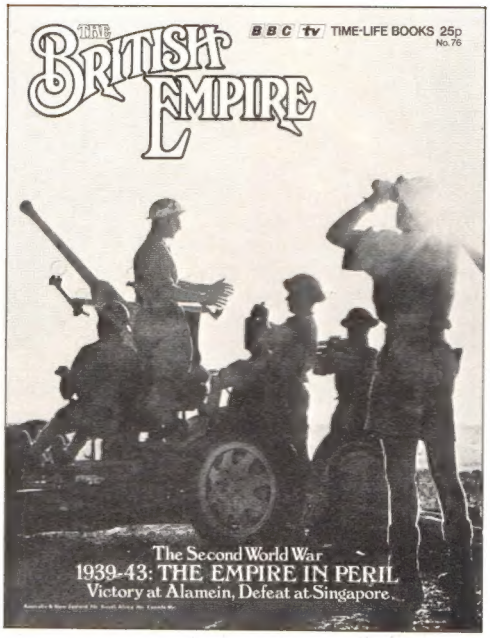

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Cover: The distinguished artist, Augustus John, drew this sketch of T.E. Lawrence when they met for the first time at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

LAWRENCE AND HIS LEGACY

While the massive, mechanized armies of Europe were bogged down in the mud of the French trenches during the First World War, a young English captain, T.E. Lawrence, was criss-crossing the deserts of Arabia on his camel. To the war-weary British, Lawrence rapidly became a hero – "Lawrence of Arabia" – the man who seemed a gallant brother to the Arabs as they fought to gain their freedom from their Turkish overlords.

But Lawrence's motives were by no means so clear-cut as the legend suggested. He was far less interested in the freedom of the Arabs than in the future of Britain as a Middle Eastern power, a fact of which his Arab allies, the Hashemites, were unaware. After the war, the Arab territories were cold-bloodedly divided into areas of British and French interest and although the British set up three Hashemites as kings of the Hejaz, Iraq and Transjordan, only Transjordan, now simply called Jordan, has managed to survive under Hashemite rule ❧

By Peter Mansfield

On May 21, 1935, the East Dorset Coroner and jury decided that "Thomas Edward Shaw, an aircraftsman (retired)," had died accidentally two days before of wounds received after crashing on his motorcycle. The unfortunate motorcyclist was better known as "Lawrence of Arabia," a national hero since his exploits in the First World War.

Famous statesmen and writers who had been captivated by his mercurial personality crowded his funeral. Winston Churchill wept and called him "one of the greatest beings of our time," prophesying that, whatever Britain's need, "we shall never see his like again."

Though Lawrence had deliberately chosen to live an obscure life in the Army and Air Force after those heady days in the Middle East, his legend lived on. He was the subject of countless school lectures and scores of books (which are still coming out today), while his own account of the Arabian campaign, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, was to become an acknowledged masterpiece.

In the minds of every English schoolboy Lawrence was the man who, in the guise of an Arab sheikh, had led – with incredible skill and daring – a successful Arab revolt against Germany's ally, Turkey, and so helped to win the First World War. But those Arabs who remembered him at all did so at best with puzzled irritation and at worst with angry resentment. The real story of Lawrence was much more complex than the legend – and much more sordid.

The reasons why a young blue-eyed Englishman had led his wild Bedouin allies against the Turks are complex: for one thing, this pro-Arab activity was a complete reversal of Britain's policy towards Turkey for, throughout the 19th Century, Britain had been Turkey's staunchest ally.

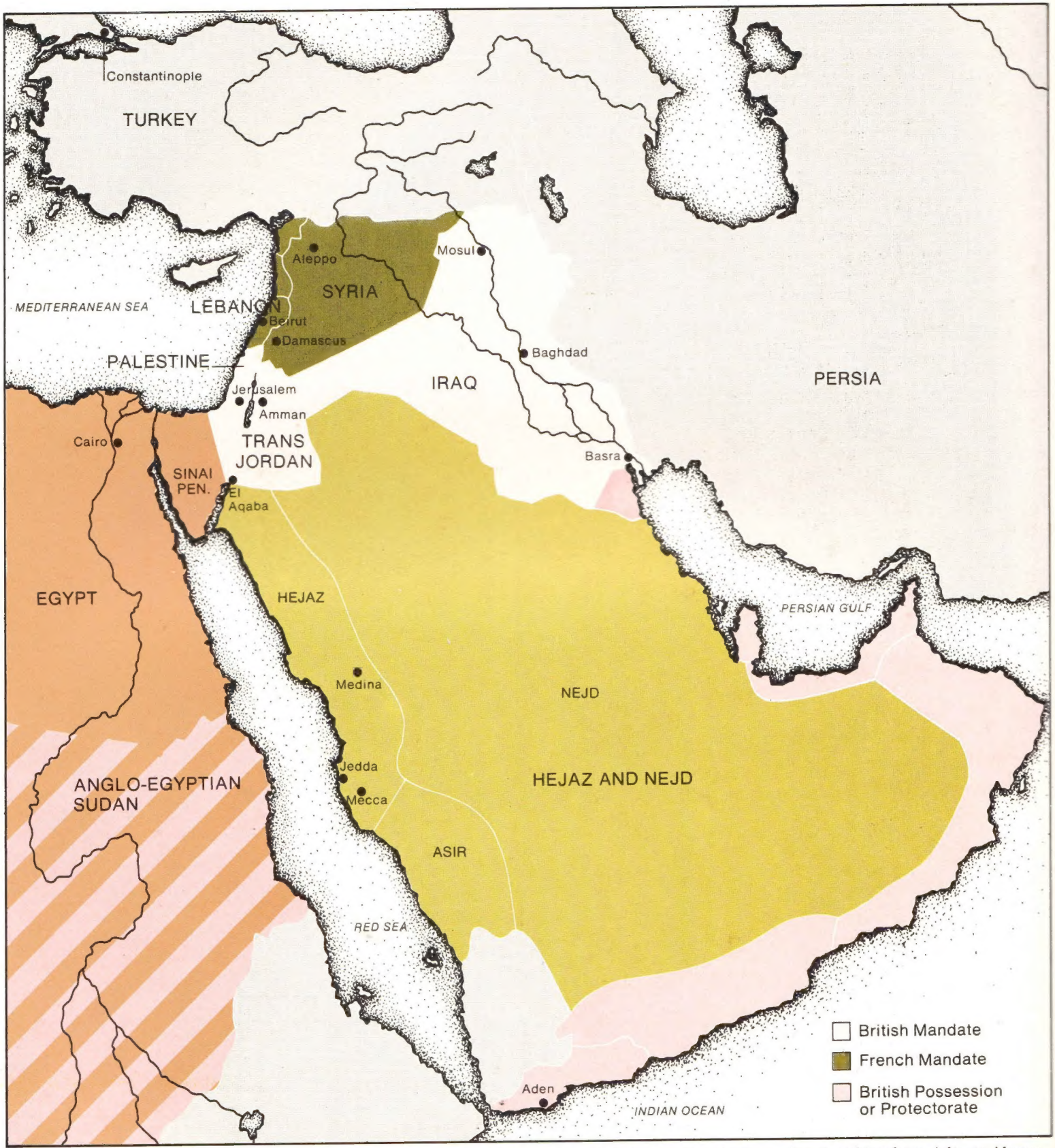
Britain had been interested in the Middle East since the time when India had become part – indeed, the central part – of the British Empire, for the area straddled that traditionally touchy lifeline of Empire, the overland route to India. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the establishment of a quick sea route to India, it became even more important that affairs in the Middle East stayed stable.

Since the early 16th Century all the Balkans and most of the Arab lands – excluding only Morocco and the more remote parts of the Arabian peninsula – had been part of the Empire of the Ottoman Turks. But, by the 1840s, the Empire was in decay. Turkey was, in the Tsar of Russia's words, "the sick man of Europe," and the vultures were gathering round to feed off the corpse. It now became vital for Britain to protect the route to India from French, Russian or any other imperial interference. To this end, in a series of treaties during the 19th Century, Britain bolstered up Turkey, supporting her against the territorial claims of the other great powers. It suited Britain better to have a weak Turkish Empire in the area rather than strong rivals.

But, in the late 19th Century, Britain's traditional relationship with Turkey started to change. The rising power of imperial Germany, eager for allies, held out the hand of friendship to Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of Turkey. Germany's ambitions received an unexpected boost when Britain, horrified by the brutal massacre by the Turks of their Christian Armenian subjects in 1896, headed Russia and France in an attempt to force reforms on the Sultan. When that happened, the German Kaiser's hand seemed well worth grasping. Abdul Hamid invited Germany to help train the Ottoman army and to build a railway eastwards from Constantinople to Baghdad. The forces that would soon lead to open Arab revolt were gathering.

Abdul Hamid was a traditional oriental despot, who ruled his Empire with a blend of intrigue and intimidation. Corps of spies and agents provocateurs, rumoured to total at least 30,000, roamed among his 22 million imperial subjects, half of whom were Arabs, the potentially rebellious inhabitants of present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Iraq and western Arabia (including the immensely important Muslim holy cities of Mecca and

The Grand Sharif Hussein, shown (above) with one of his sons, the cultured Abdullah, standing respectfully behind him, was the desert patriarch who decided to throw in the lot of his Hashemite family with the British against the Turk. His decision changed the course of Arab history, but it was his son Feisal (left) whom T.E.Lawrence chose to be the leader of the Arab Revolt.



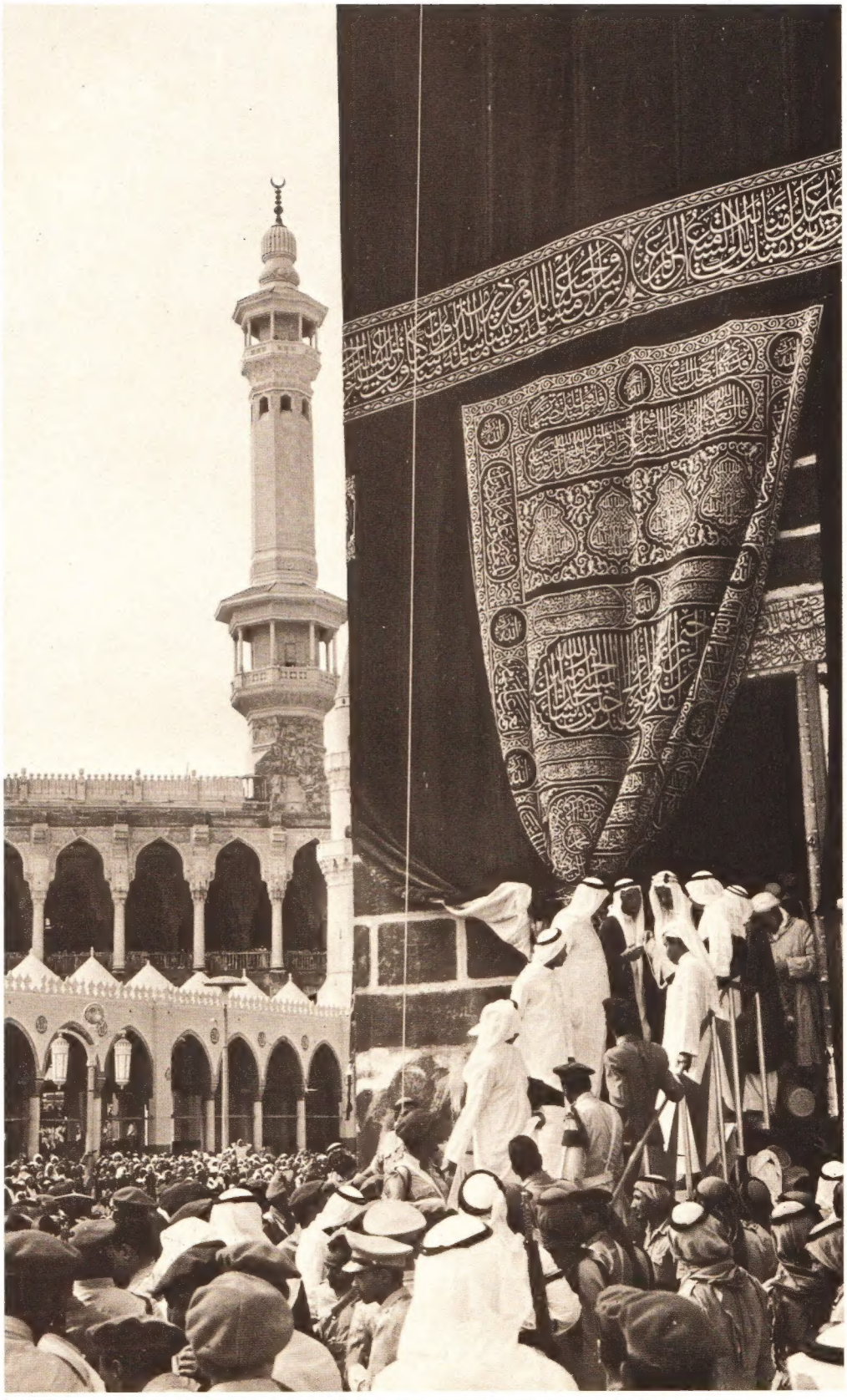
This map of the Middle East shows the area as it was in 1926. Grand Sharif Hussein's dream of an Arab empire stretching from Aden to Aleppo and across to Basra had vanished. Even his own kingdom of the Hejaz had been absorbed by the conquering Ibn Saud, ruler of the Nejd.

Medina, in the province of the Hejaz). The Sultan also exercised a much looser authority over Yemen and central Arabia. One of his methods of keeping his Arab subjects contented was to build a railway from Damascus to the Hejaz to assist Muslims in making the Pilgrimage to Mecca. The fact that the railway also allowed Ottoman troops to be moved swiftly into Arabia in case of need was less widely appreciated.

The Sultan was ruthless in dealing with opposition, but there were certain people who were too important simply to "disappear." One of these was Sheikh Hussein Ibn Ali, a prominent member of the House of Beni Hashem, the noblest of Arab families, who traced their descent in the male line from the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. Indeed, the Hashemites were theologically much better claimants to the Caliphate, the spiritual headship of Islam, than the Sultan himself. The Sultan kept this strongly independent character with his wife and four sons under careful watch in Constantinople from 1893 to 1908.

In 1908, the Sultan's rule was overthrown by an élite group of army officers known as the "Young Turks." One of their first decisions was to appoint Hussein to be the Grand Sharif of Mecca and Keeper of the Holy Places of Islam. By long tradition, the Hashemites were entitled to this position of immense spiritual significance in the Islamic world.

It was a fateful decision for the future of the Ottoman Empire and, indeed, the future of the Middle East as a whole, for this was the man who was to forge the link between the British and the Hashemites. That alliance led to Lawrence's leadership of the Arab Revolt and ultimately to the creation of three Arab Hashemite kingdoms, or "Anglo-Arab monarchies" as they have been called. Although it was not immediately apparent, it was their misfortune to be founded under Britain's aegis at a time when the power of the British Empire was in decline. As Britain's creatures and clients they were highly vulnerable to the new forces at work in the Arab world and of the three only one (Jordan) has perilously survived through a combination of special circumstances and the pertinacity of its Hashemite rulers.



Pilgrims in Mecca gather around the Ka'ba, the most sacred shrine of Islam, which gave Hussein, as its official protector, enormous power throughout the Muslim world.

As soon as Hussein arrived back in Mecca, he began to show his independence by reviving the Grand Sharif's prerogatives which previous holders of the office had allowed to lapse, asserting himself against the local Turkish governor and restoring the hegemony of the Sharifate over the tribes of the Hejaz.

In the spring of 1914, the Young Turks were regretting his appointment and had secretly decided that he must be deposed. It was then that the Sharif's second son, the 30-year-old Amir Abdullah, called upon Lord Kitchener in Cairo cautiously to sound out Britain's reaction in the event of an open breach between Arabs and Turks.

But as the first step towards a relationship that was to have such a momentous result, the meeting itself was rather farcical. Abdullah certainly did not want to commit himself to Britain at this stage, so, hoping merely to make his interest known on a social rather than a political level, he decided to call ostentatiously on Kitchener at a time when the overlord of Egypt should not have been at home. But he was. The two men warily discussed their battle scars, and little else.

Kitchener, too, did not want to be tied down. The British government's policy was still to preserve the Ottoman Empire. Although war with Germany was generally expected, it was by no means certain that Turkey would be the Kaiser's ally, and it was of the greatest importance to Britain that war with Turkey should be avoided – India contained 70 million Muslim subjects who still regarded the Ottoman Sultan as the Caliph, or Ruler of the Faithful, and no one could be sure if, in the event of war with Turkey, they would fight against the Sultan-Caliph on behalf of his Christian Majesty King George V.

A new factor had also to be considered – oil. This had first been discovered in large quantities in southern Persia in 1908 and its potential importance was already realized. From 1904 onwards, Britain's First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Fisher, had been busy converting the British fleet from the use of coal to oil for power. Although Persia was not part of the Ottoman Empire, it was known that Mesopotamia was also likely to be rich in oil and a rather surprising syndicate of British and German interests had secured a concession to exploit all the oil within the Empire's borders.

In this uncertain situation, the wary friendship between Abdullah and Kitchener prospered. Abdullah came to Cairo for a second time and this witty and cultivated Arab prince extended his British contact by establishing a close rapport with Kitchener's Oriental Secretary and confidant, the urbane and ultra-civilized Ronald Storrs. The two men spent hours together, playing chess and quoting Arab poetry.

War was approaching, and the significance of the Grand Sharif's overtures through his son became increasingly apparent. On one occasion, Abdullah asked Storrs if Britain would present the Sharif, his father, with "a dozen or even half a dozen machine-guns" for defence against the Turks.

In August, Britain, France and Russia were finally at war with Germany and Austria. In November, Turkey joined the Central Powers.

Immediately, the Grand Sharif found himself in a very delicate situation. He was beginning to cherish the ideal of an independent Hashemite Empire, uniting the whole of the Middle East. Now war had been declared he could gain his ambition in one of two ways. Either he could stand with Turkey and gain the rewards of loyalty or he could throw in his hand with the British and use their help to mount a full-scale rebellion.

The decision had to be made when the puppet Sultan-Caliph who had succeeded Abdul Hamid issued a call to all the faithful for a "jehad", or holy war, against the infidel. The potential effect on Muslims in India, French North Africa or the Russian Empire was incalculable. But, to be really effective, the Grand Sharif of the holiest city of the Muslim world must issue the call from Mecca itself. The Sharif kept stalling, sending messages to the Sultan that he was praying for success in the war against the infidel ("May God lay them low"), but he was sure His Sublime Majesty would understand that the time was not propitious, as the British might attack the people of the Hejaz and bombard them into rebellion against the Ottoman Empire.

While messages were travelling between the Sharif and the Sultan, the British were beginning to realize that they desperately needed the Sharif's help. Though there were other, more martial potentates in the Arab peninsula, he had the advantage of his spiritual strength. Of Hussein's sons, Abdullah was in favour of throwing in the Hashemite lot with the British, though his third son, Feisal, urged caution.

Kitchener had been recalled to London to join the War Cabinet in 1914 but he sanctioned an initial response to Sharif Hussein's overtures. Clandestine negotiations through secret emissaries took place between Ronald Storrs, Colonel C.F. Clayton, director of Military Intelligence in Cairo, Sir Reginald Wingate, Governor-General of the Sudan, and the Sharif in Mecca. Then, in January, 1915, Sir Henry McMahon, a senior Indian civil servant, arrived to assume the post of High Commissioner for Egypt (which Britain had finally declared a British protectorate) and he took charge of the negotiations.

In the same month Sharif Hussein received another secret emissary – this

The typically English looks of Sir Ronald Storrs, Oriental Secretary in Cairo, were belied by an impressive knowledge of Arabic culture. Abdullah once remarked that he must be a Muslim since he was so free with his quotations from the Koran.

time from the Arab nationalist societies in Syria and Iraq. Concern for security was so great that when the messenger whispered into the ear of the Sharif, the Sharif stared unresponsively out of the window. But the message was clear: the Arabs of Syria would take part in a British-backed revolt against the Turks and accept Sharif Hussein as "spokesman of the Arabs" provided he could extract suitable terms from the British.

The vital question now was what these terms would be, and this was to be the subject of hard bargaining between Hussein and the British which took the form of a prolonged correspondence between the Sharif and McMahon.

At the outbreak of war all Kitchener had offered in a cable to Abdullah was: "If the Arab nation assists England in this war England will guarantee that no intervention takes place in Arabia and will give Arabs every assistance against external foreign aggression." But Hussein and the Arab nationalists of Syria and Iraq wanted much more than this.

In his first letter Hussein proposed that Britain should back an area of Arab independence embracing the whole of what is now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and the entire Arabian peninsula with the exception of Aden – a British colony. In the ensuing correspondence, the Sharif made a few reluctant and imprecise concessions: he accepted that Britain's treaties with certain Arabian chiefs should remain and agreed to a temporary British military occupation of Iraq (where British and Indian troops had already landed at Basra and were fighting the Turks). He neither accepted nor refused but postponed his decision on a British demand that parts of Syria "lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" be excepted from the proposed area of Arab independence.

The failure to clarify all these points – especially the last – was a major cause of future trouble. British statesmen (including those involved) and historians have disputed ever since whether the exception of western Syria was meant to include Palestine.

The problem was made worse by the fact that the style of both McMahon's and Hussein's letters was exceptionally vague. (In McMahon's case they read like a Gilbert and Sullivan parody of *The Arabian Nights*. One began: "To the excellent and well-born Sayid, the descendant of Sharifs, the Crown of the Proud, Scion of Mohammed's Tree and Branch of the Kuraishite trunk, him of the Exalted Presence and of the Lofty Rank . . . the lodestar of the Faithful and the cynosure of all devout Believers . . ." down to "may his Blessing descend upon the people in their multitudes.")

But while the wily Sharif thought he would make his own terms with the British since they were clearly desperate for his help, he did not realize that the British had a much deeper motive for wanting to start the revolt than simply defeating the Turkish Sultan: Britain was looking to her own future in the Middle East.

To this end, she was secretly negotiating with France on the future of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat even while McMahon was corresponding with Hussein. The result was the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement (named after the British and French negotiators), concluded in the spring of 1916. This effectively divided the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire outside the Arabian peninsula into areas of future British and French control or influence.

The Russian Tsarist government was a minor party to the Sykes-Picot agreement and when, after the October, 1917, Revolution, the Bolsheviks hastened to expose this "imperialist plot" the British were embarrassed, the Arabs dismayed and the Turks delighted. It so happened that November, 1917, saw the publication of the famous Balfour Declaration, whereby the British government declared its support for the establishment of a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine.

This greatly increased the alarm and suspicions of the Arabs because, although the Declaration stated that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine" (i.e. the Arabs, who formed about 93 per cent of the population), they already had more than an inkling that the real aim of the Zionists was to turn Palestine into a new land of Israel with a Jewish majority.

However, all this still lay in the future. On June 10, 1916, the still unsuspecting

Tragedy at Kut

British imperial annals are dotted with disasters – Yorktown, Isandhlwana, Kabul, Khartoum – and the one which occurred in April, 1916, at Kut-al-Amara, a small town on the Tigris river, 100 miles south of Baghdad, deserves to rank with them. Here 8,000 British and Indian soldiers, unable to reach their objective, Baghdad, were besieged and starved into surrender by the Turkish army.

There was no immediate need to capture Baghdad. Britain already held the key towns controlling the Persian Gulf, thus protecting her Middle Eastern oil fields. But there were long-term considerations which seemed to justify the otherwise unnecessary assault: the need to prevent possible Turkish attacks on Allied ships bound for India and to extend British control in the Middle East.

For such an operation, large resources of men and munitions were necessary. But only one depleted division of 12,000 men, under Major-General Charles Townshend, set out in November, 1915. On the 26th a defeat with severe losses, at Ctesiphon, 18 miles south of Baghdad, forced them back on Kut.

There the troops, now 8,000 strong, entrenched themselves to await rescue by a relief expedition. But the bulk of the Turkish army, deployed in rough country south of Kut, was ideally placed to hold off the relief force. Additionally hampered by floods, the relievers failed in three attempts to break through to Kut. An effort by Lawrence to buy off the besiegers with £1 million was contemptuously rejected by the Turkish commander Khahil Pasha.

Horsemeat was plentiful at first – for those who wanted it: vegetarian members of some Hindu sects refused it, despite dispensation from their religious leaders – but by April the garrison was slowly starving to death at the rate of 30 a day. On April 29, 1916, came the surrender. The weakened survivors were force marched across the desert to imprisonment at Aleppo, a sad and cruel end to a venture which ought never to have been started. The defeat was revenged only a year later by the British army in a successful advance to seize Baghdad.

Indian Lancers march through the streets of Kut during the recapture of the town, ten months after the humiliating and costly surrender to the Turkish army in April, 1916.

Sharif finally launched the Arab Revolt by symbolically firing a rifle at the Turkish barracks in Mecca. First Mecca and then Jedda on the coast fell to the insurgents, but the Turkish garrison in Medina continued to hold out against the Sharif's ill-trained and ill-equipped troops. Though the Arabs fought boldly against lightly armed garrisons, they often ran away from artillery. After one such retreat, the Arabs explained that they had "withdrawn to make ourselves some coffee."

In October, 1916, Ronald Storrs arrived in Jedda from Cairo to see what could be done to pull the Revolt together. He was accompanied by a slim, blond and very untidy young temporary captain in the intelligence service – T.E.Lawrence.

Lawrence was one of five illegitimate sons of an Anglo-Irish baronet and a governess. The baronet had employed the governess to mind his legitimate children and had then run away with her and set up another home. At school Lawrence showed outstanding intelligence and was sent to Oxford, where he came under the influence of the tall, black-bearded D.C. Hogarth, author, don and archaeologist. But Hogarth was more than a brilliant academic: he was also a political intelligence agent specializing in the Middle East and a powerful behind-the-scenes member of the British Establishment.

He was strongly influenced by the ideas of the "think-tank" of Edwardian Imperialism, Lord Milner's *Round Table*, which was the name of both a periodical and a study group. Hogarth chose Lawrence as a young man capable of disseminating these somewhat impractical ideas for imperial federation. His deep interest in Lawrence is shown in a detailed report he wrote on his pupil, ending: "He should go far; but he may be driving lonely furrows where at present few expect him to plough."

With Hogarth's approval Lawrence spent the immediate pre-war years travelling in the Middle East, studying the Arabs and their language as well as military tactics and medieval history, and on occasions carrying out some part-time spying on the Turks and Germans. During these years Lawrence gained a detailed knowledge of, although, contrary to the legend, no particular affection for,

The Bull who Trampled the Turks

During the First World War the Middle East acquired a crucial significance: the Kaiser dreamed of dominating the crescent lands of the Levant, of slashing Britain's imperial lifelines to East Africa and India and of thus destroying Britain as a great power. The Ottoman Empire, whose domain then ran – in theory if not in practice – from Constantinople to Egypt's western border, was, after careful cultivation as an ally, his natural instrument against Britain. It fell to one of history's greatest soldiers, General Edmund Allenby, to thwart these grandiose plans. He defeated the Turks in a dazzling campaign in which he deceived them into so dividing their forces as to transform his own two-to-one superiority into a preponderance of four-to-one.

Starting in the autumn of 1917, he led his troops – partly British, partly Arab – northwards from Beersheba, then along the Mediterranean coast to the port of Jaffa, inland to Jerusalem and thence, keeping the enemy off-balance by a series of subtle feints, to Damascus, Beirut and Aleppo. Again and again, he tricked them into believing that he was concentrating his strength at one point, only to attack at another. He finally trapped them in the heart of Palestine.

He had determined that no injury must befall Jerusalem, and he took the sacred city completely without resistance. Lawrence, who was with him when the city surrendered, said, "the campaign was perhaps the most scientifically perfect in English history," and that "the victory had been the logical fruit solely of [Allenby's] genius." Allenby, in his turn, praised Lawrence publicly, but he could never quite decide how much he was "genuine performer and how much charlatan." He once said of Lawrence to a brother-general, "He thinks himself a hell of a soldier, and loves posturing."

As a reward for his Middle East victory, Allenby was promoted to field marshal, created Viscount Allenby of Megiddo and Felixstowe, and awarded a grant of £50,000. In 1919, he was made High Commissioner of Egypt.

As a man, Allenby was a paradox. Straightforward almost to the point of rudeness, he was utterly military in his bearing, heavily built and powerful. To those he commanded, he was known as "the Bull," though his strategy combined the wiliness of the serpent with the sharp ferocity of the tiger. Despite his authoritative appearance and dominating intellectual brilliance, in his private life he was precisely the opposite: gentle and contemplative, he adored the English countryside, loved to garden and spent his last years fishing and bird-watching.

The massive General Sir Edmund Allenby, known as "the Bull" to his colleagues.

General Allenby meets the notables of Jerusalem and promises them freedom of worship for Jew, Muslim and Christian alike.

The allied troops pour into Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate while the city's inhabitants watch them from the rooftops.

the Arabs and an abiding hatred of the Turks and the French, who were Britain's biggest rivals in the Middle East. (Hogarth and the *Round Table* members were also deeply anti-French.)

When war broke out in 1914 Lawrence's special knowledge of the Middle East was clearly going to be useful, and Hogarth used his influence to get his 26-year-old protégé into Military Intelligence. Lawrence was posted to Cairo, where he recruited agents and, although only a captain in rank, conducted several highly independent intelligence operations against the Turks. In January, 1916, Colonel Clayton set up his small but influential Arab Bureau in Cairo with a staff (to which Hogarth was recruited) of intelligence and diplomatic officers who became responsible for the British involvement in the Arab Revolt. Lawrence succeeded in attaching himself to the Bureau and he went to Jedda with Ronald Storrs to report on the state of progress of the Revolt.

Lawrence's British colleagues and superiors were either captivated by his dynamic and impishly independent personality or infuriated by his arrogance and indifference to authority. No one remained neutral towards him. His emotional make-up was highly complex and remains mysterious even today, in a large part due to the fact that he was a compulsive liar and it is impossible to take anything he said or wrote at face value. But from the conflicting mass of evidence emerges a character shy and self-advertising at the same time, who punished his body both by driving it to the limits of its endurance and, on occasions, more directly by the administration of repeated beatings. Nevertheless, in spite of his tormenting self-doubts, he was an astute judge of character and an indefatigable asset to British operations.

When this as yet obscure young captain arrived in Jedda, he soon summed up the Sharif's family. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence described them. "The first, the Sharif of Mecca we knew to be aged. I found Abdullah [the second son] too clever, Ali [the first son] too clean, Zeid [the fourth son] too cool. Then I rode up-country to Feisal [the third son] and found in him the leader with the necessary fire."

Feisal had a splendid presence and was more sophisticated, in a Western sense, if less intelligent than Abdullah, who remained at heart a Bedouin chieftain. At Lawrence's first meeting with Hussein's family, he clashed with Abdullah. When Lawrence discussed the Turkish positions, Abdullah exclaimed a little irritably to Storrs, "Is this man God, to know everything?" There can be no doubt that Feisal, who had been won over to wholehearted support of a revolt against Turkey by the brutal Turkish repression of the Arabs in Syria, was chosen by Lawrence as the ideal instrument for maintaining British control over the Arab national movement and, ultimately, for achieving Lawrence's personal objective of an Arab "brown dominion" within the British Empire. For his part, Feisal trusted Lawrence entirely, in the firm belief that he would help the Arabs achieve complete independence under Hashemite rule.

Lawrence attached himself to Feisal, and for a while the relationship was an open and honest one. But soon Lawrence learned, through the Arab Bureau, of the Foreign Office's plans to carve up Syria and Iraq between Britain and France after the war.

Hogarth and Lawrence were appalled – but not because they believed in the Arab right to independence: the two imperialists simply wanted the hated French to have no share in the Arab world. Consequently, they set out to undermine the Sykes-Picot agreement. Although ultimately they failed, Lawrence did manage to keep the terms of the agreement from Feisal until he was totally dependent on Britain and unable to withdraw from the British-backed uprising.

Lawrence soon became the acknowledged leader of the Arab Revolt and also, much to his satisfaction, succeeded in overriding the views of his French counterpart in the Hejaz, Colonel Edouard Brémond, with whom he was on particularly bad terms, on the conduct of the war against the Turks.

By mastering irregular guerrilla tactics, wearing Arab dress and learning to ride camels superbly, Lawrence turned himself into a Bedouin warrior. An interesting sidelight on Lawrence's personality is shown in a manual for political officers which he wrote in August, 1917. In this, he implies that he wore Arab dress, not because he loved the Arab way of life, but because it was the best way to "handle" the Arabs. "If you can wear Arab kit when with the tribes you will acquire their trust and intimacy to a degree impossible in uniform. It is, however, dangerous and difficult."

With Auda "the Hawk," a famous tribal leader, he captured the important town of Aqaba in July, 1917. Afterwards, in a series of daring raids he pursued his attacks on Turkish supply lines, especially the Hejaz railway.

It was from this period that the Lawrence legend derived. On the Arab side there can be no doubt of the devotion of his Bedouin followers to "al-Orens," as they called him. They admired his courage, devotion and skill as a guerrilla leader. But they were few in number and are now dead. For the Arabs, the short-lived Lawrence myth was lost in the squalid betrayal of the post-war settlement.

For the British, on the other hand, the myth flourished for much longer. At a time when the British, French and Germans were monotonously slaughtering each other in the mud of Flanders, the romantic, individualistic character of Lawrence's desert guerrilla campaign had an irresistible appeal. It was easy for the British public, encouraged by able propagandists such as the American journalist, Lowell Thomas, who depicted Lawrence as a blue-eyed Robin Hood of the desert, to believe that he had led the Arabs virtually single-handed to victory. King George V was caught up in the enthusiasm and asked for a private showing of Thomas's lecture and lantern-slide show. Other British officers played vitally important roles in the Arab Revolt but Lawrence was the only name that anyone remembered.

In military terms, the Arab Revolt immobilized some 30,000 Turkish troops along the Hejaz railway, prevented a link-up between the Turkish forces in Arabia and the Germans in East Africa and generally helped to weaken the Turkish armies. But the central responsibility for defeating the Turks lay with Britain's General Sir Edmund Allenby. Known as "the Bull," he was a military administrator and strategist of genius who, in the autumn of 1917, launched a successful offensive from Sinai, sweeping up into Palestine to occupy Jerusalem in December, 1917.

Allenby's advance was delayed by the severe 1917–18 winter and stubborn Turkish resistance, but in the following summer he advanced, with Feisal and Lawrence on his right flank, to victory, taking Damascus on October 1, and Beirut on the 8th. The British were doing well, too, in Iraq. The Anglo-Indian force had advanced from Basra and, after an initial disaster in 1916, when 8,000 of them surrendered to the Turks at Kut, had gone on under General Maude to capture Baghdad in March, 1917. By the end of 1918 virtually all of what is now Iraq was in British hands. On October 30, 1918, Turkey signed the Mudros armistice and the war in the Middle East came to an end.

The Allied forces and the Arabs made a triumphant entry into Damascus, capital of Syria. The Arabs of Syria, although subdued by Turkish repression and decimated by famine, went wild with enthusiasm at their liberation and the prospect of independence.

But the leaders of the Arabs already had good reason for doubts about the future. Two years before, in November, 1916, Sharif Hussein had proclaimed himself King of the Arab lands. Britain and France, however, recognized him only as King of the Hejaz and he had had to be content with that. Then, at the end of 1917, came the Balfour Declaration stating Britain's views on the future of the Jews in Palestine and the revelations about the Sykes-Picot agreement. Even though the Zionist leader, Chaim Weizmann, had assured Hussein that the Jews did not aim to set up their own government in Palestine and British representatives told him that Sykes-Picot had now been superseded, Hussein remained doubtful – and with good reason.

Britain also tried to calm the fears of the Arabs with a series of well-publicized policy declarations (including one in conjunction with the French) made before the war ended. All these said, in effect, that the Allies fully supported the famous principles of "self-determination" and "consent of the governed" which had been enunciated by the American President, Woodrow Wilson, and had so raised the expectation of all subject peoples. In reality, Britain and France had already agreed to divide between them all Turkey's former Arab provinces that were of political interest to them.

THE LEGEND OF LAWRENCE

During his two years of desert warfare, Lawrence became a folk hero to the British. A nation sickened by the slaughter of the French trenches seized on the romantic picture of "al-Orens" (as his Arab followers called him), galloping at the head of his Bedouin troops in their revolt against their Turkish overlords. Few, least of all the Arabs, were aware that he was far more interested in gaining British dependencies than freedom for the Arabs. But whatever his motives, no one questioned his military skill: he swooped on Turkish troop-trains supplying the southern territories along the Hejaz railway, organized an attack on the Turks' Red Sea port of Aqaba and marched triumphantly into the city of Damascus.

The Train Wrecker

In a letter to a fellow officer describing one of his daring raids on a Turkish train, Lawrence vividly captures the excitement he felt fighting in the desert. The train, he wrote, "had two locomotives and we gutted one with an electric mine. This rather jumbled up the trucks, which were full of Turks shooting at us. We had a Lewis, and flung bullets through the sides. So they hopped out and took cover behind the embankment and shot at us between the wheels, at 50 yards. Then we tried a Stokes gun, and two beautiful shots dropped right in the middle of them. They couldn't stand that (12 died on the spot) and bolted away to the East across a 100-yard belt of open sand into some scrub. Unfortunately for them, the Lewis covered the open stretch.

"The Turks then nearly cut us off as we looted the train, and I lost some baggage, and nearly myself. My loot is a superfine red Baluch prayer-rug. I hope this sounds the fun it is. The only pity is the sweat to work them up and the wild scramble while it lasts. It's the most . . . Buffalo-Billy sort of performance, and the only people who do it well are the Bedouin."

An exhilarated Lawrence strides past the camera in full Arab dress.

Lawrence led many Arab patrols like this one through the desert. His machine-gunner described how well he rode a camel: "he made a point of doing anything the Arabs could do and doing it better."

A "tulip," a bomb whose metal "petals" opened on impact and sprayed lethally in all directions, explodes in the distance on the Hejaz railway line near the junction town of Deraa.

The two Englishmen (left and right) in Arab robes in this picture taken by Lawrence testify to the part the British played in the apparently spontaneous Arab Revolt.

A Turk views a train halted by a wrecked railway tunnel on the Hejaz railway.

The Military Strategist

Lawrence's most dramatic military achievement was his attack on the vital town of Aqaba in July, 1917. This was the last port the Turks held on the Red Sea and its loss meant that the Arab army could join up with the imperial army in Egypt to complete Turkey's defeat.

With the independent and fierce old desert chief Auda, 33 camel-men armed with rifles, and saddle-bags full of gold, Lawrence set out to march 200 miles north from Wejd on the Red Sea over the most arid desert in the world.

The gold and Auda's reputation attracted some 500 local tribesmen and the band attacked the pass commanding the route to Aqaba on July 2. The outcome was both superb and comic: in a wild camel charge at the enemy, Lawrence accidentally shot his mount and was knocked out as the beast fell. When he came to, the battle was over, with 460 Turks dead or captured for the loss of two Arabs. The almost undefended town fell easily. Lawrence returned to Cairo in triumph, the war against the Turk in Arabia nearly over.

The triumphant Arabs, having smashed Turkish resistance at the pass, march proudly to take Aqaba on July 6, 1917.

The stern features of the chieftain Auda explain why he became known as "the Hawk."

Feisal's brother Zeid's troops land from the sea to help Lawrence take Aqaba.

The King Maker

After the British under General Allenby had launched a brilliantly successful offensive from Sinai, with Lawrence and his Arabs sweeping up the right flank, they occupied Jerusalem in December, 1917. From there Allenby planned his assault on Damascus, to end 400 years of Ottoman domination over the Arabs. Nine months later, on September 30, the final push brought the allied troops to the gates of Damascus.

Now Lawrence hoped to realize a long-standing political ambition: to make Feisal the king of Syria under British protection, thus "biffing the French out of all hope of Syria." Ignoring the fact that the Australians had already arrived, he arranged for the Arabs to march in triumph into the city and ensured that an Arab was governing there.

But Lawrence's and Feisal's hopes were rapidly dashed. Allenby summoned Feisal to the Victoria Hotel and informed him – through a discomfited Lawrence acting as interpreter – that Syria was to be a French protectorate and Feisal was to have no real power. Lawrence's attempt at king-making had failed. Soon he left for England, a broken man.

General Allenby, seen here in his staff car in Damascus, gave Lawrence a free hand to organize the immediate government of the city – but when he realized the extent of Lawrence's political ambitions, he clamped down firmly on his subordinate.

The defeated Turkish troops carry away the crescent symbol that had fluttered over Damascus for the previous 400 years.

Lawrence wrote that the Australian troops "ran the campaign as a point-to-point with Damascus as the post."

A bewildered Feisal leaves the Victoria hotel having learnt that all the promises of the British, including those of his friend Lawrence, had been worth nothing.

II. Kingdoms Built Upon Sand

When the war ended, the whole of Syria and Iraq were described as "Occupied Enemy Territory" and administered under military law pending a peace settlement. The area was occupied by British troops with a small French force on the Syrian coast and Feisal's army in the interior. In Palestine there was a British military administration, on the Syrian coast a French provisional government. Although the main cities of Syria and Transjordan were governed by an Arab administration under Feisal, there was a significant attachment of British and French officers.

Iraq was treated as a single unit under one administration with a British civil commissioner at its head. This was the cool and careful Sir Percy Cox who had many years experience in the Persian Gulf. He was assisted as Oriental Secretary by one of the most remarkable Englishwomen of the century, Gertrude Bell. Tall and gaunt, with an addiction to Parisian hats, Gertrude Bell had already earned her reputation as an intrepid traveller and oriental scholar. She knew as much as, if not more than, Lawrence about Arab tribal politics and she shared his dream of establishing a Hashemite Arab state under British patronage (which would exclude the French).

The Paris Peace Conference which, among other things, was to decide the future of the Ottoman Empire, opened in January, 1919. Feisal, with Lawrence as his adviser, went as spokesman for the Arabs, but he was in a weak and difficult position. Snubbed and cold-shouldered by the French, who never relaxed their hostility towards the Hashemites, he was more than ever dependent on British support. On French insistence he attended the conference as representative only of the Hejaz and not of his dream empire.

In fact, the important decisions about the future of the Arab lands had already been taken without his knowledge as the British and French premiers, Lloyd George and Clemenceau, had come to an understanding on the revision of the Sykes-Picot agreement. Militarily, Britain was much stronger than France in the Middle East, but the area had to be seen in a world context in which France was still Britain's principal ally despite growing friction between them.

Lloyd George and Clemenceau had agreed that Palestine and Iraq would be under British administration while the French would have Syria, Lebanon and a proportionate share in Iraqi oil. The British government still hoped that the French would be willing to co-operate with Feisal's government in Damascus, but there was nothing much it could do if they would not.

Lawrence had not despaired of "biffing the French out of all hope of Syria" as he had written in a now famous letter earlier in the war. In January, 1919, he had coaxed a dubious Feisal into an agreement with the Zionist leader Weizmann on Zionist-Arab co-operation in Palestine. Though it seemed satisfactory at the time, it was largely meaningless because of the Zionists' real intentions and Feisal's doubts about them.

Lawrence had conceived a half-baked scheme whereby, with the help of Zionist money, Feisal could be made financially, and therefore politically, independent of the French. In a letter to a colleague at

The indefatigable Gertrude Bell, pictured in one of her favourite Paris hats (above), and Sir Percy Cox, shown (right, in the centre) with a group of Arab chieftains, were Feisal's two staunchest upholders in his uphill struggle to hold the quarrelsome new state of Iraq together in the 1920s.

the time Lawrence sketched out a remarkable vision of the future: "The British Empire has been increased by this war in Africa, and in Australasia: and in Asia we have taken on Persia, Mesopotamia, Arabia, and half of Syria. We will crash with all these new houses, unless we can find tenants for some of them. Therefore we need Zionist and Arab cooperation. Australia won't like brown citizens of the Empire – but it's coming anyhow. They are 5,000,000 and the Browns about 300,000,000." (Lawrence was looking forward to the day when India and the Arabs would have dominion status.) To Lord Curzon, Lord President of the Council, Lawrence wrote, "My own ambition is that the Arabs should be our first brown dominion, and not our last brown colony."

Lawrence's dream may have been imperialist but it was far from illiberal at a time when those with non-white skins were still considered to be incapable of self-government. But the dream was not realized for a number of reasons: determined French opposition, the ultimate impossibility of co-operation between Zionists and Arabs who had their own aims in view, and finally the military incompetence of the Hashemites who Lawrence hoped would lead the Arabs into the British Empire.

As King of the Hejaz, Hussein was the only independent Hashemite monarch to have emerged from the war. He still enjoyed the prestige of the Keeper of the Holy Places but his kingdom was desperately poor and financially dependent on Britain. Moreover, he was no match in the field for the rising new warrior, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, the new power in central Arabia. In December, 1915, Ibn Saud had signed a treaty with the British government which gave Britain a large measure of control over his policy in return for a monthly subsidy and recognition of the internal independence of the Nejd. Ibn Saud enjoyed the support of the government of India which, although under the ultimate control of Whitehall, held its own views about the future of the Middle East. It tended to regard both the Arabian peninsula and Mesopotamia (Iraq) as its special provinces and, in common with the 70 million Muslims of India, had no sympathy with King Hussein's pretensions as a religious and political leader. Thus there existed the extraordinary situation of two arms of the British government in direct conflict with each other. The Foreign Office continued to support the Hashemites while the India Office favoured Ibn Saud's plans to take over the Hejaz.

In May, 1919, Ibn Saud attacked and nearly annihilated a force led by the Amir Abdullah which had been sent to deal with him. Only British pressure prevented him from going on to seize the Hejaz from Hussein. For this he had to wait another five years.

Meanwhile, Feisal was trying to consolidate his role in Syria which was even more vulnerable than that of his father in the Hejaz. In May, 1919, he returned from Paris to Damascus and elections were held in those parts of Syria under his control. The National Congress which resulted proceeded to pass vigorous resolutions declaring Syria (including Palestine) an independent Arab state, repudiating both the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration.

But none of this was very realistic, and when Feisal returned to Europe in the autumn of 1919 he was forced to compromise in order to try to save what was left of Arab hopes of independence. Urged on by Lloyd George, he reached an agreement with Clemenceau by which he accepted the French occupation of the entire coastal area of Lebanon and Syria. This did not please his followers; on March 8, 1920, the Syrian National Congress passed a resolution proclaiming Feisal King of Syria (including Palestine and Lebanon). At the same time a meeting of Iraqi leaders passed a similar resolution concerning Iraq and chose Abdullah as their first monarch.

The Allies reacted swiftly. The Supreme Council of the League of Nations (equivalent of the United Nations Security Council) met at San Remo and announced its decisions on May 5. Britain was to have the mandates for Palestine and Iraq, and France a joint mandate to administer Syria and Lebanon.

Feisal now ruled what was perhaps the shakiest kingdom in history. The French made little secret of their intention of establishing direct control over the whole of the Syrian interior as well as the coast and were seeking only an excuse to occupy Damascus. Enraged by the San Remo decisions, young Syrian Arab officers were only too ready to provide the French with their pretext by attacking their "border" posts between the coastal region and the interior and the confused and irresolute Feisal was unable to restrain them.

On July 14 General Gouraud, the French commander in Beirut, issued an ultimatum which demanded an unqualified acceptance of the mandate and a French military occupation of Aleppo and the other main towns of central Syria. Feisal, urged by Lord Curzon to avoid hostilities with the French at all costs, actually accepted the ultimatum. But it was no use. General Gouraud's terrifying Senegalese and Moroccan Arab troops advanced and occupied Damascus. Feisal's forces fought back bravely but could do little against the French tanks and artillery. Feisal himself was "invited" by the French to leave Syria. The British government, genuinely dismayed by what had happened, could neverthe-

This formal photograph of the Cairo Conference of 1921, held to tie up the loose ends left from the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, emphasizes how the conference itself was a formality. The main decisions – Iraq and Transjordan to be British-controlled, Syria a French mandate, Hussein, an old ally, to be abandoned – had all been taken in advance. Sir Basil Liddell Hart later wrote: "Everything staged before they went out. . . . Talk about leaving things to man on spot – we left nothing." Among the delegates are the principal conspirators: Churchill (centre front), Lawrence (second row, centre) and Gertrude Bell (second row, second from left).

less only express sympathy and wash its hands. It did invite Feisal to London where he arrived, a dignified but pathetic figure, in December, 1920.

Unlike the French, Britain did not have to use force to establish her Arab mandates because her troops were already in occupation. But she was facing severe trouble in both of them. In Palestine the first incidents in the Arab-Jewish conflict occurred in 1920 and in Iraq Britain faced a full-scale Arab rebellion against this occupation.

British officials in Iraq were divided between those, like Gertrude Bell, who favoured indirect British control through Arab institutions and an Arab (preferably Hashemite) Amir and others, like the redoubtable Acting Civil Commissioner, Colonel A.T.Wilson, an arch-imperialist who believed in direct colonial rule which would make Iraq rival the Indian Empire as the brightest jewel in the British imperial crown.

Wilson's ideas were in line with the imperialists in the British cabinet who had argued during the war that Britain should do everything to obtain "a continuity of territory or of control both in East Africa and between Egypt and India." Such men even considered "Indianizing" Iraq by settling thousands of Indians in the country.

Eventually, it was Gertrude Bell's views which prevailed, but not before Wilson's repressive measures had helped to provoke an uprising of the tribes of central Iraq which was only put down at the cost of 10,000 casualties and £40 million – more than three times the sum Britain had spent on subsidizing the Arab Revolt.

In view of the generally unsatisfactory situation in Britain's semi-colonial Arab Empire, Lloyd George decided on a fresh approach. In order to put an end to the disastrous rivalry in the Middle East between Lord Curzon's Foreign Office and Edwin Montagu's India Office, he decided to put the whole problem into the hands of the young Winston Churchill's Colonial Office.

One of Churchill's first actions was to persuade Lawrence to join his newly created Middle East Department as adviser on Arab Affairs. After a series of urgent discussions in London, in which

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THE ENIGMA OF LAWRENCE

Little is known of the childhood of Lawrence, shown (left) at the age of four and (below) with his four brothers. All were illegitimate, a fact of which Lawrence was almost certainly ashamed.

The snapshots taken of T.E. Lawrence throughout his life show the different roles he played – scholar, leader, recluse – but give little hint of the complexity of his character. Even his own writings give little guidance: though at first sight masterpieces of clarity, they are as contradictory as the facts of his life. Who was the real Lawrence? The enthusiastic student on archaeological digs? The desert leader? The great literary figure who wrote *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*? The man obsessed with motorcycles and motor craft? Or the man who, in despair, sought peace through anonymity "in a brain-sleep" in the Army and Air Force? No one has yet decided.

Lawrence and the archaeologist, Sir Leonard Woolley, display a 9th-Century B.C. Assyrian plaque at Carcemish, Asia Minor.

This photograph of Lawrence in an Arab Amir's white robes epitomizes the legend that grew up around him.

As Aircraftsman Shaw, Lawrence sought anonymity in the Air Force, but his identity soon leaked out.

Lawrence looks a broken man as he leaves the R.A.F. for the last time.

Lawrence sits astride one of his motorcycles. He was killed in 1935 in a motorcycle accident while trying to avoid two children.

Lawrence poses with the strategist Sir Basil Liddell Hart at the time he was designing motor craft in the R.A.F.

The Arabian explorer, St. John Philby, seen here with an Arab escort at Jedda, was Abdullah of Transjordan's first financial advisor.

the exiled Feisal was involved, Churchill called a conference in Cairo in March, 1921, to endorse his decisions. Lawrence said later: "The decisions of the Cairo Conference were prepared by us in London, over dinner tables at the Ship Restaurant in Whitehall."

The conference was attended by all the senior officials in Britain's new Arab "empire" – Sir Percy Cox and Gertrude Bell from Iraq, and the newly appointed High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel. On an amicable trip during the conference it is recorded that Churchill fell off his camel and Lawrence roared with laughter.

It had already been arranged between Churchill, Lawrence, Cox and Bell that Feisal should be made King of Iraq. Brushing aside Lloyd George's doubts about the reaction of the anti-Hashemite French towards the sudden promotion of the man they had recently expelled from the throne of Syria, Churchill suggested that Iraqi public opinion should be prepared well in advance to give Feisal a good welcome.

Churchill had, in fact, another more immediate problem. In November, 1920, the Amir Abdullah had arrived in Maan (in what was to become Transjordan) at the head of a motley army of tribesmen and retainers and announced his intention – possibly spurious and certainly unrealistic – of marching on Damascus to avenge his brother's expulsion.

His presence on the East Bank of the river Jordan was not unjustified. This dry, unpromising territory, inhabited largely by Bedouin, had, in Ottoman times, been virtually independent under its tribal rulers and during Feisal's brief reign in Damascus it came nominally under his authority. Moreover, although the French were demanding that Britain expel Abdullah, the British felt some obligation towards the Sharif Hussein's second son, who now appeared to have no hope of acquiring an Arab throne, let alone an empire.

Churchill, accompanied by Lawrence, went up from Cairo to Jerusalem and summoned Abdullah to meet him. Abdullah, like a good oriental salesman, began by naming what he knew was an impossible price: that Transjordan should be incorporated into Palestine as a single Arab state with himself as king. When Churchill turned this impossible scheme down, he suggested that Transjordan should be joined to Iraq.

Finally, he accepted Churchill's proposal that he should "temporarily" become ruler of the independent Amirate of Transjordan, with an annual British subsidy and British advisers, on the

understanding that Britain would try to persuade the French to restore an Arab administration in Damascus with Abdullah at its head. Abdullah knew very well that there was no chance of this, but a reasonably secure amirate was worth several hypothetical kingdoms.

The temporary arrangement, therefore, became permanent and Transjordan was incorporated into the Palestine mandate, under the High Commissioner in Jerusalem with the proviso that the Mandatory (i.e. Britain) could exclude it from the area of Jewish settlement. This was done and for nearly 30 years Transjordan remained a poor but relatively peaceful desert Arab state under British guidance and protection.

There remained the problem of ensuring that Feisal was accepted as King of Iraq by a large majority in a national plebiscite. Gertrude Bell and Sir Percy Cox gave all their considerable energy to the task. (Some members of the British administration, such as H. St. John Philby, famous Arabian explorer and father of Kim Philby, the Soviet agent, doubted the wisdom of imposing Hashemite rule on Iraq and favoured a republic. Philby was overruled and resigned.)

Feisal went first to Mecca from London and made a carefully staged triumphant arrival in Baghdad in June. A series of meetings of tribal leaders was held throughout the country. Gertrude Bell was usually present to give support. At one moment Feisal faltered in a speech and gave her a beseeching look of inquiry to which she responded with an encouraging nod. At another, when a tribal leader remarked with tactless honesty that he was ready to swear allegiance to Feisal because he was acceptable to the British, Gertrude saved the day by clasping her hands as a symbol of British-Arab friendship in equality.

Feisal's most serious rival in Iraq, Sayid Talib, was invited to tea with Gertrude Bell and Lady Cox. As he left, he was whisked into an armoured car and shipped off for a prolonged stay in Ceylon. Finally, Feisal was elected King by a 96·8 per cent majority. Tribal leaders had recognized that he was Britain's choice – and Britain had the power. On April 23, 1921, Feisal I was proclaimed King of Iraq and Gertrude could write to her father: "We have had a terrific week but we've got our King crowned."

With Abdullah and Feisal settled in Amman and Baghdad, their aged and by now bitterly resentful father still presented a problem. Lawrence was dispatched to Jedda to persuade the old man to accept the accomplished fact that Syria, Lebanon and Palestine were lost to the rule of his family.

Hussein's stubborn refusal to sign the treaty which was offered him drove Lawrence into a fury. He wrote home describing the King of the Hejaz as "conceited to a degree, greedy and stupid."

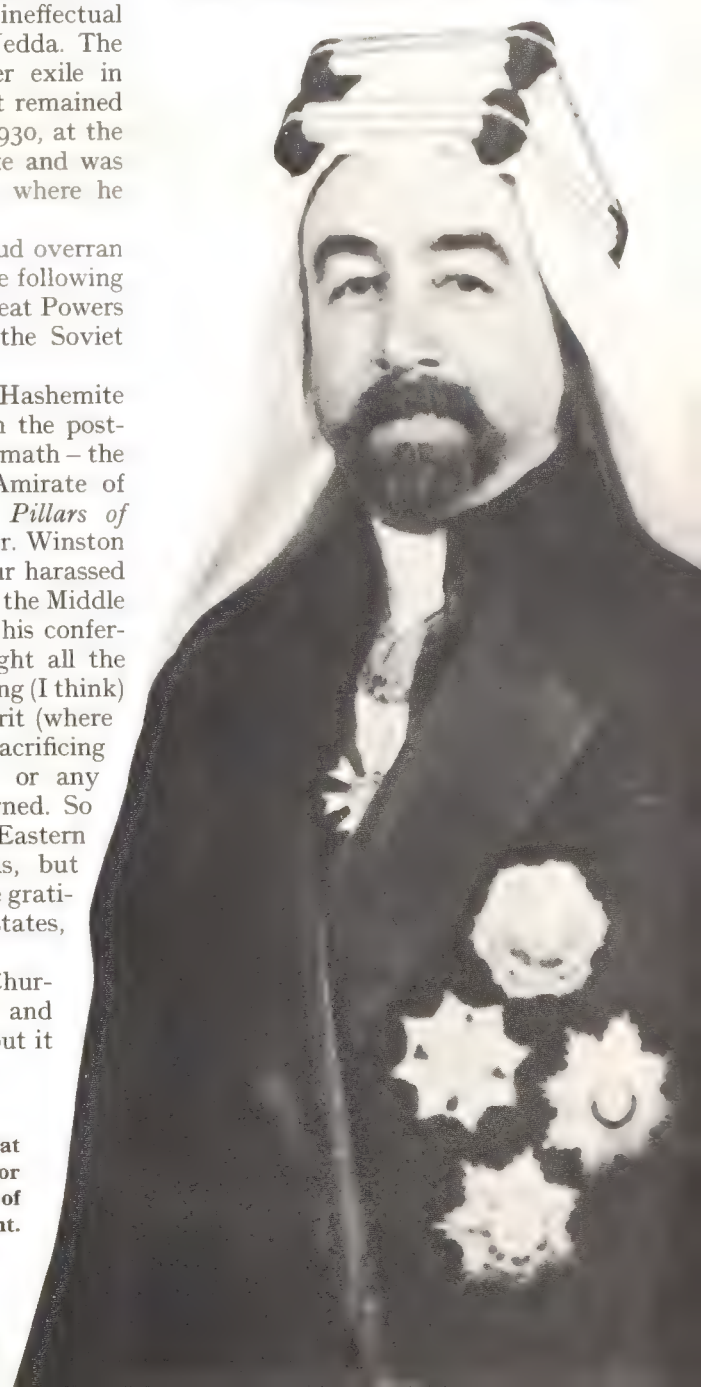
Hussein never did sign and in 1924 the matter was settled when Ibn Saud, freed from his promise not to attack Iraq, Kuwait or the Hejaz by the ending of the annual British subsidy, overran Mecca with his fierce Wahhabi troops. Hussein abdicated in favour of the ineffectual Amir Ali, who withdrew to Jedda. The old Sharif retired to a bitter exile in Cyprus, taking with him what remained of his gold in petrol tins. In 1930, at the age of 75, he suffered a stroke and was allowed to move to Amman where he died a year later.

In December, 1925, Ibn Saud overran the rest of the Hejaz and in the following year was recognized by the Great Powers as King of the Hejaz, with the Soviet Union leading the way.

Only two British-sponsored Hashemite states therefore emerged from the post-war "settlement" and its aftermath – the Kingdom of Iraq and the Amirate of Transjordan. In *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence wrote: "Mr. Winston Churchill was entrusted by our harassed Cabinet with the settlement of the Middle East; and in a few weeks, at his conference in Cairo, he made straight all the tangle, finding solutions fulfilling (I think) our promises in letter and spirit (where humanly possible) without sacrificing any interest of our Empire or any interest of the people concerned. So we were quit of the war-time Eastern adventure, with clean hands, but three years too late to earn the gratitude which peoples, if not states, can pay."

Lawrence's admiration for Churchill was doubtless sincere and indeed warmly reciprocated but it is difficult to believe that he suffered no pangs of conscience when he wrote these words, despite the significant qualifications of "(I think)" and "(where humanly possible)". Whatever the reasons, Britain had not fulfilled either the letter or the spirit of the promises which inspired the Arabs to revolt against the Turks.

But what of the interests of the British Empire, none of which, according to Lawrence, had been sacrificed? He had fought hard to "biff the French out of Syria" and had failed. The brown dominion of which he had dreamed had not come into existence. Yet it could be claimed that for some 30 to 40 years after the First World War Britain held the position of paramount power in the Middle East. The eastern Arab world (that is excluding French North Africa and Italian Libya) was not part of the British Empire



The urbane Abdullah realized early on that his kingdom of Transjordan depended for survival on British aid. Making a virtue of necessity, he befriended the British Resident.

but it was emphatically part, and a very important part, of the imperial system. British troops in Palestine and Egypt guarded the life-line of the Empire. One M.P. was to remark as late as 1956 that: "The Suez Canal and the area surrounding it are in some essential sense part of the United Kingdom." Many Englishmen would have gone further and included the Red Sea and Aden.

In Iraq, once the views of those who favoured the creation of a permanent link with India had been decisively rejected, Britain's primary interest was oil. Lord Curzon's statement that "the Allies in World War I floated to victory on a wave of oil" was prophetic, if exaggerated, and through her special position in Iraq Britain was able to secure a concession covering virtually the whole country for British oil interests.

Later, political and commercial pressures obliged Britain to allow several American and one French company a share in the development of Iraq's oil resources, but the Iraq Petroleum Company remained under British control and was always regarded by the Iraqis as the major instrument of British power and influence in their country. Its existence made it easier for Britain to relax the outward forms of its political control which were repugnant to Iraqi nationalists.

A series of Anglo-Iraqi Treaties in the 1920s – which were always opposed by the nationalists because they did not go far enough towards removing the limits to Iraq's independence – culminated in one of 1930 by which Iraq became a sovereign member of the League of Nations two years later.

Yet, to a certain degree, Iraq still remained tied to the British Empire. Under the 1930 Treaty Britain retained Air Force bases in Iraq who was obliged to regard herself as Britain's ally in the event of war. (In the Second World War, Britain actually overthrew an Iraqi nationalist revolt, which was seeking help from the Axis powers, and restored the Hashemite monarchy.) It was not until the Iraqi Hashemites were finally destroyed in the bloody revolution of 1958 that Iraq ceased to be regarded in the Arab world as a British satellite.

Unlike Iraq, Transjordan was a wholly artificial British creation. But despite this, and although its population was composed largely of quarrelsome Bedouin tribesmen, it was easier to fashion it into the semblance of a unified nation with which Britain was able for a time to establish a fairly harmonious relationship. Two outstanding Anglo-Arab administrators, Sir Henry Cox and Sir Alec Kirkbride, were given the chance, as Abdullah remarked in his own memoirs "to do good to the Transjordanians, even against their will."

The most notable British achievement in Transjordan and the partial fulfilment of Lawrence's dreams was the creation of the Arab Legion. This was the Transjordanian army named by Abdullah after the regulars who fought with Feisal in the Arab Revolt.

It was the work first of Colonel F.G. Peake, a former commander of the Egyptian Camel Corps, and later of General J.B. Glubb, or Glubb Pasha as he was always known.

Peake concentrated on training the villagers to defend themselves; Glubb was mainly concerned with the Bedouin from whom he formed a desert patrol as an arm of the Arab Legion. Between them

King Feisal II poses (left) as a carefree Harrow schoolboy and (below seated, second from left) in his Arab robes on a trip to London. The two pictures symbolize the Hashemites' tragic position, suspended between the Arab and British worlds. By their dependence on Britain they forfeited Bedouin loyalties and when British support vanished, they lost everything. Feisal, the last Hashemite ruler except for Jordan's King Hussein, was killed in the 1958 revolution that established Iraq as a republic.

they fairly easily pacified Transjordan internally and, with greater difficulty, protected its southern and eastern borders against the forays of Ibn Saud's Wahhabi warriors who, on one occasion, advanced in large numbers in a swirl of dust towards Amman only to be repelled by two aircraft and four armoured cars.

As in Iraq, but at a more leisurely pace, Britain transferred its mandatory powers to Transjordan. The 1928 treaty recognized Transjordan's independence, although Britain retained control over finance, foreign affairs, jurisdiction over foreigners and "freedom of conscience." In 1939 Britain agreed to the conversion of the Legislative Council into a cabinet with ministers responsible to the Amir.

In 1946 Transjordan became fully independent and, following the Arab-Israeli war and Abdullah's annexation of the West Bank – the part of Palestine which remained in Arab hands – he was proclaimed King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – the only Hashemite monarchy which survives precariously to this day (although half occupied by Israel) under Abdullah's grandson, Hussein.

Even after the declaration of Transjordan's independence the country remained under British tutelage. Lacking any resources of its own, Transjordan depended heavily on British subsidies – especially for the army, which continued to be trained and commanded by British officers until Glubb's summary dismissal in February, 1956, by the young King Hussein, who deeply resented his paternalist attitude. With the termination of the Anglo-Jordanian Treaty (including the British subsidy) in the same year, the United States replaced Britain as Jordan's chief outside protector and supporter.

Elsewhere in the Arab world the United States was taking over Britain's semi-imperial role, although its style and methods were different. In the 1930s American interests acquired the concession to exploit Saudi Arabia's oil resources which were to prove to be some of the richest in the world. Oil was discovered in 1937, but production was held up by the Second World War, and it was Britain who provided King Ibn Saud with an annual subsidy to help him in his severe financial straits.

The American oil companies became alarmed that Britain might increase her political hold over Saudi Arabia to a point that would endanger their concession and, with support from the U.S. government, provided the old king with loans to see him through the war. The United States won the rather curious competition with Britain to pay Ibn Saud the most money fairly easily both because it was richer and because oil revenues increased rapidly again after the end of the war.

In 1945 Britain, with her huge military bases in Suez and Palestine, was still seemingly the paramount power in the Middle East. In that year she was largely responsible for forcing France to grant independence to Syria and Lebanon (an action which Charles de Gaulle neither forgot nor forgave) and the Arab League was established under her auspices. Thirteen years later, after the Suez fiasco of 1956 and the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, Britain's Middle East hegemony was little more than a memory except on the fringes of Arabia – in the booming port of Aden, the barren hills of the Aden Protectorate and in the Persian Gulf, where the British Resident was still to play a pro-consular role from his headquarters in Bahrain for another decade.

Many factors contributed to the extinction of British power: the post-war exhaustion which caused Britain to hand over the Cold War command in the Middle East sector to the United States; the disastrous failure to find any solution to the Arab-Jewish problem in Palestine,

and its abandonment on the doorstep of the United Nations; and, above all, the granting of independence to the Indian sub-continent which removed the very foundation of Britain's interest in the Middle East. Britain's brief Arabian adventure was over.

It is often said that an instinctive bond exists between Britain and the Arabs. If this were true, the attempt to incorporate them within the British imperial system was natural, if belated. But the proposition hardly stands up to examination.

Certainly, there were individual Englishmen who distinguished themselves as explorers, scholars, soldiers or, more recently, as administrators in the Arab world. Apart from Lawrence, there were men like Doughty, Philby, Cox, Kirkbride, Ingrams, Glubb and a score of others who have played a role in the modern history of the Arab nation even if there are few Arabs who care to remember them today. There were, too, some fearless and formidable English ladies in a line that stretches from Lady Hester Stanhope, William Pitt's niece who became the uncrowned Queen of Palmyra, through Gertrude Bell to the contemporary traveller Freya Stark.

Some of these Englishmen, but by no means all, were genuinely devoted to the Arabs. It is easy to believe Glubb when he writes of the time he was serving as a young officer in Iraq: "I made up my mind to resign my commission in the British Army and devote my life to the Arabs. My decision was largely emotional. I loved them."

But almost invariably the aspect of the Arabs these Englishmen fell in love with was the dying civilization of the nomadic desert tribes. They hated its destruction by the overpowering influence of Western urban values. Undoubtedly, the new forces had their uglier aspects (although these Englishmen exaggerated them as much as they romanticized the virtues of the desert), but no 20th-Century nation could ignore them. The new Arab political élite was formed more by its attitude to the riches that lay under the desert than the romance of the desert itself. Unless Britain could compete with America and Russia on an economic level, then her Arab pseudo-Empire was doomed. And modern Britain could not compete

The end of the British involvement in the Arab kingdoms was marked when John Bagot Glubb (above), the effective head of Jordan's armed forces for over 20 years, was sacked in 1958 by Hussein, the present king of Jordan shown (below), wearing the headdress of the Arab Legion.

Colour Sergeant, Grenadier Guards, 1845